

# IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

## Digital Repository

---

Leopold Center Completed Grant Reports

Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

---

2002

## Closing the loop, expanding the circle: Educational outreach for institutional food waste on small farms

Nan Bonfils

*Full Circle Farm*

Suz Welch

*Camp Hantesa*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold\\_grantreports](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold_grantreports)



Part of the [Agricultural Education Commons](#), and the [Environmental Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bonfils, Nan and Welch, Suz, "Closing the loop, expanding the circle: Educational outreach for institutional food waste on small farms" (2002). *Leopold Center Completed Grant Reports*. 180.

[http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold\\_grantreports/180](http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/leopold_grantreports/180)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Leopold Center Completed Grant Reports by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [digirep@iastate.edu](mailto:digirep@iastate.edu).



## Closing the loop, expanding the circle: Educational outreach for institutional food waste on small farms

**Abstract:** *This project increased the awareness of summer camp visitors about alternatives to using public landfill facilities for disposing of food waste.*

### Background

The goal was to expand and improve the educational outreach capacity of an established composting project between two partners, Full Circle Farm and Camp Hantesa.

Objectives were to:

1. Establish recognizable connections for youth between dining hall activity (food waste collection) and farm activity (composting food waste, amending soil, growing food),
2. Promote awareness for youth of alternative (non-landfill) food waste disposal,
3. Provide youth with experience in sustainable agriculture through local food production, and
4. Investigate educational possibilities with regional stakeholders.

### Approach and methods

The collaboration with Camp Hantesa began in April 2001 and continued through October, when the last school group from Hantesa visited the Full Circle Farm and filled raised beds with compost from the previous year's compost pile.

At the core of the project was work with Camp Hantesa, which provided the food waste and the target youth audience. Interaction was primarily with the camp's adult staff, apprentices, and junior counselors. The principal investiga-

tor visited the camp five times a week to monitor the compost project. Bonfils also conducted four "formal" sessions for education on food waste composting. To open the session, campers were asked what they knew about composting and recycling, and what they thought about visiting the farm and landfill and their reactions were mixed.

Campers were then given a brief lesson on microbes, carbon, and nitrogen. They would then guess the weight of food waste they were hauling to the farm that day, and use a scale to check the guesses. Campers then visited the farm where the actual composting was taking

**Principal Investigator:**

Nan Bonfils  
Full Circle Farm  
Madrid

**Co-investigator:**

Suz Welch  
Camp Hantesa  
Boone

**Budget:**

\$1,900 for year one



**Question:** How can a farm composting system gain additional nutrients? **Answer:** By reaching out to a neighbor and recycling nutrients that would have been lost to the landfill. Recycling waste should be part of the total food system and can be done with basic farm equipment.

place. Although plastic gloves were handed out, nearly all of the campers discarded the gloves as they explored the previous year's compost pile. The comment most often received: "It doesn't smell like garbage." The campers would poke, dig, and take temperature readings at various spots in the old and new piles. The four visits from Hantesa included mixing the food waste from the camp with on-farm composting materials.

Hantesa campers' trips to the farm also included a service component that was related to the composting process. Activities included pulling vegetation from the edges of the compost pile, scrubbing buckets, preparing ground for a raised bed, and filling the bed. Every Hantesa visit also included a walk through the CSA (community supported agriculture) vegetable garden with a chance to sample whatever produce was ready.

The most successful learning experiences included a trip to landfill so that students could see where the food waste *wasn't* going! The



landfill tour validated the apprentices' work with food waste compost and encouraged them to avoid products that weren't easily recycled or composted. Two sessions visited the landfill site.





Camp Hantesa visitors comprised only about 10 percent of the groups that came to Full Circle Farm for an educational experience. One of the unexpected outcomes of the project was the tremendous interest expressed in the compost project by nearly everyone who viewed it. Participants at the Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) Community Day/SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) field day frequently mentioned the project in their evaluations as their biggest surprise or discovery. One said, “I loved the compost operation. . . . the sociological heart of the farm.”

### Impact of results

In six months, this project:

- Diverted more than two tons of waste from the Boone County landfill,
- Created nearly six tons of usable compost,
- Engaged more than 2,300 Hantesa diners in recycling,
- Hosted four large groups from Hantesa at Full Circle Farm, and
- Educated several other groups of school children, as well as 75 attendees at a SARE/PFI Community Day.

*For more information contact Nan Bonfils, Full Circle Farm, Madrid, Iowa 50156; (515) 795-3288, e-mail FullCircleFarm@opencominc.com.*